

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend claims 1 and 16, as follows:

1. (Currently Amended.) A method for producing cheese, said method comprising
- a) subjecting a mixture of (i) cream and (ii) a whey protein preparation to a homogenization process; wherein said whey protein preparation comprises hydrolyzed whey proteins;
 - b) mixing said homogenized mixture from said a) with a milk to provide a cheese milk; and
 - c) producing cheese from said cheese milk, wherein said cheese has improved meltability compared to cheese made using an unhydrolyzed whey protein preparation.
2. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 1, wherein said homogenization process comprises emulsification.
3. (Reiterated.) A method a defined in claim 1, wherein said whey protein preparation is selected from the group consisting of whey protein isolate and whey protein concentrate.
5. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 4, wherein said whey protein preparation exhibits a degree of hydrolysis (DH) of between about 0.5% and about 20%.
6. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 5, wherein said whey protein preparation exhibits a degree of hydrolysis (DH) of between about 1% and about 10%.
7. (Reiterated) A method a defined in claim 6, wherein said whey protein preparation exhibits a degree of hydrolysis (DH) of between about 2% and about 8%.
8. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 4, wherein said hydrolyzed whey proteins are prepared by contacting whey proteins with a glu/asp-specific protease.
9. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the mixture is contacted with a protease prior to said homogenization step.

10. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 9, further comprising inactivating said protease prior to said homogenization step.

11. (Reiterated.) A cheese product produced using a method as defined in claim 1.

12. (Reiterated.) The method as defined in claim 1, wherein said homogenized mixture comprises a whey protein:fat ratio of at least about 2% by weight.

13. (Reiterated.) The method as defined in claim 1, wherein said homogenized mixture comprises a whey protein:fat ratio of at least about 4% by weight.

14. (Reiterated.) The method as defined in claim 1, wherein said homogenized mixture comprises a whey protein:fat ratio of at least about 8% by weight.

15. (Reiterated.) The method as defined in claim 1, wherein said homogenized mixture comprises a whey protein:fat ratio of at least about 12% by weight.

16. (Currently Amended.) A method for producing cheese, said method comprising:

- (i) providing a mixture comprising (a) cream and (b) a whey protein preparation; wherein said whey protein preparation comprises hydrolyzed whey proteins;
- (ii) subjecting the mixture to a homogenization process; and
- (iii) incorporating the homogenized mixture produced in (ii) into cheese wherein said cheese has improved meltability compared to cheese made using an unhydrolyzed whey protein preparation.

17. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 16, wherein said homogenization process comprises emulsification.

18. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 16, wherein said whey protein preparation is selected from the group consisting of whey protein isolate and whey protein concentrate.

20. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 19, wherein said hydrolyzed whey proteins are prepared by contacting whey proteins with a glu/asp-specific protease.

21. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 16, wherein the mixture of step (i) contributes more than about 5% of the total fat in the cheese.

22. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 21, wherein the mixture of step (i) contributes more than about 20% of the total fat in the cheese.

23. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 22, wherein the mixture of step (i) contributes more than about 40% of the total fat in the cheese.

24. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 16, wherein the mixture of step (i) is contacted with a protease prior to step (ii).

d' 25. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 25, wherein the protease is inactivated prior to step (ii) or step (iii).

26. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 16, wherein the mixture of step (i) further comprises a phospholipase.

28. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 16, wherein said cheese is selected from the group consisting of ripened and unripened cheese.

29. (Reiterated.) A method as defined in claim 28, wherein said ripened cheese is cheddar and said unripened cheese is mozzarella or cream cheese.

31. (Reiterated.) A cheese product produced by a method as defined in claim 16.